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Together but Separate: Uncovering School Segregation in 2018

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Sociology

Bridgewater State University

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Abstract

While many Americans assume that school segregation and other forms of racism are a thing of the past, the reality is that our country still has a long way to go in terms of racial equality, especially when it comes to our public-school system. Schools today are more segregated than they were more than 60 years ago when *Brown vs. Board of Education* was put into effect. This thesis seeks to understand the concept of school segregation as a part of America today. The following work analyzes both the history of school segregation as well as its role today, through studying how the Brockton public school system has been combatting this ongoing problem. Massachusetts has continuously been struggling with school systems stratified by race and class, and the Brockton area has put a strong focus on their education goals including integration and desegregation plans (Ayscue 2013; Carroll 1989; Willie and Alves 1996). The goal of this project is to explore the reality of what schools' racial compositions look like in 2018, and how it continues to impact students and communities of color. I have collected publicly available secondary data on the Brockton school system and conducted in-depth interviews of community members in order to view solutions to this problem more closely. My findings concluded that the Brockton public school system has been diligent in creating equal opportunity for students of all races and backgrounds, resulting in a strong and diverse community that models the positive impacts of racial integration.

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Introduction

Following the 2016 election, many disturbing events have transpired which suggest that our country has not made as much progress as we think when it comes to addressing racial equality. While there are various important issues at the forefront of this matter, many of them don't make headlines in the news because of how seamlessly they are woven into the fabric of our nation. One of the most overlooked and deeply rooted problems is our country's school segregation. Many citizens are unaware that school segregation, along with other forms of racism, is not a thing of the past, and the reality is that our schools today are more segregated than they were over 60 years ago when Brown vs. Board of Education was first put into effect.

In 1954, the Brown v. Board of Education decision concluded, "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place" because "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Feagin and Barnett 2004:4). While this victory became a cornerstone of the civil rights movement, it did little for long-term racial integration. Black families continued to be marginalized by school systems across the country. It wasn't until the 1968 Green vs. School Board of New Kent County decision, that schools were required to integrate. By the mid-1970s, hundreds of school districts were subject to court-ordered desegregation, and segregation levels declined substantially by the mid-1970s. By 1980, only one-third of black students attended heavily segregated schools, illustrating limited progress (Reardon 2014). However, in the 2016-2017 school year, the average black student in Little Rock still went to a school that was roughly 14 percent white, 14 percent Hispanic and 68 percent black compared to twenty years ago when it was 27 percent white, 1.7 percent Hispanic

and 70 percent black. Little Rock exemplifies our misunderstanding of history, as well as our country's recent backsliding.

Not only is segregation alive and well, but it exists in schools everywhere, not just in the South or in Conservative states. Over half a century after separate but equal schools were declared inherently unequal, intensely segregated nonwhite schools have more than tripled (Black 2017). It is time to understand the concept of racism as a part of America today, and one of the most significant sources of evidence is in our education system. This thesis will closely examine the problem of racially imbalanced schools, as well as offer solutions based on the progress of systems in New York City, Little Rock Arkansas, and Brockton Massachusetts. School segregation remains our country's most urgent civil rights issue, and by allowing this process to continue, we are setting children of color up for failure, holding back our society as a whole, and perpetuating racist conditions for future generations.

The goal of this project is to create a research document that traces the tumultuous journey of integration in schools through a review of scholarship as well as secondary data and in-depth interviews from the Brockton public school system. It aims to provide a greater understanding of how racism continues to pervade the school system in USA in 2018, especially in areas with politically liberal leanings that often aren't recognized as segregated (Chokshi 2014). My goal is to first explain the problem on modern day segregation through existing data cited below, and then focus in on the school system in Brockton, which has been reportedly working to address the issue. This thesis aims to understand how school segregation is largely misunderstood; what really happened after the passage of the Brown v Board decision; and how we have backslid to where we are today in terms of segregation in schools both in general and in progressive states

such as Massachusetts in particular. Another desired outcome of this thesis is to understand how persistent segregation in schools impacts students and communities of color. Finally, I will also document the ways and means in which students, teachers, and parents have faced this challenge, dealt with its consequences, and have attempted to mitigate the situation. This thesis builds on my past research, which made me familiar with scholarship on this theme. I also believe that education is a key determinant in a child's ability to succeed, and I hope my findings will illustrate and encourage a need for change in our public-school system.

Literature Review

Historical Background

The history behind African American education reveals Black and Brown children to be victims of an educational debt that has been neglected for too long. The racism in our country reveals a system that favors whiter, more affluent children. The effects of inadequate public schools on students of color is both immeasurable and largely ignored. It is important to detangle the complicated history of our public education system to fully understand the experiences nonwhite children have endured. For African Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement. Blacks were kept out of schools until they created their own; African Americans and philanthropic northern missionaries established schools in Union-occupied territories, attracting newly freed slaves after the Civil War (Sumner 2016). Following the Emancipation Proclamation, there was further development of the Freedmen's schools, with the purpose of educating the servant class (*Freedmen's Schools*). During the long period of legal apartheid, African Americans attended schools where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from white schools, and the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural black students was only a mere 4 months long (Ladson-Billings 2006). While schools were

scarce, and conditions were lowly, many Blacks quickly realized that attaining an education was a symbolic step towards equality as well as a physical means of achieving it, as the ability to understand labor contracts and other legal documents was critical (*Freedmen's Schools*). Despite the enactment of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, legal segregation nevertheless remained a pervasive issue, and nowhere was the existence of legal segregation more prevalent than in school systems throughout the United States (Feagin and Barnett 2004). While African Americans have long been the backbone of our country, their education has yet to be prioritized. Although minority groups continue to be at an educational disadvantage today, the strides they have made are largely thanks to their own efforts in spite of fierce prejudice. It is important to recognize how black students started off at a disadvantage, as we look at their educational experience.

The existence of legal segregation was prevalent in school systems throughout the United States because of the U.S. Supreme Court's "separate but equal" doctrine set forth in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In 1896, the Supreme Court had ruled that racially segregated public facilities were legal, so long as the facilities for Black and Whites were equal, which in turn created laws preventing African Americans from sharing the same buses, schools and other public facilities as their white counterparts (*Brown v. Board of Education*). By the early 1950s, the NAACP was working hard to challenge segregation laws in public schools and had begun filing a number of lawsuits; The most prominent of the five cases was Oliver Brown's class-action suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951, after his daughter was denied entrance to Topeka's all-white elementary schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*). Brown claimed that schools for black children were not equal to the white schools, and that segregation violated the so-called "equal protection clause" of the 14th Amendment, which declares no state can "deny

to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” (*Brown v. Board of Education*). Finally, in 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision concluded that “in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” because “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Feagin and Barnett 2004:4). While this victory remains one of the cornerstones of the civil rights movements, in actuality it did little to enforce proper racial integration, and black families continued to be marginalized by school systems across the country. It wasn’t until the Supreme Court’s 1968 *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* decision that school districts were required to adopt more effective plans to achieve integration. By the mid-1970s, hundreds of school districts were subject to court-ordered desegregation plans; As a result, school segregation levels declined substantially between 1968 and the mid-1970s. By 1980, only one-third of black students attended heavily segregated schools, illustrating limited progress (Reardon 2014). While many people imagine the following decades to be the beginnings of desegregation, this brief progressive period ended up being the height of legal integration.

One of the most significant moments of the civil rights movement, The Little Rock Nine, is also often misunderstood in history. Most Americans know there were the nine black teenagers who were escorted by federal troops through an angry white mob to get to the doors of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, on Sept. 25, 1957 (Associated Press 2017). Unfortunately, what many don’t know is that the sacrifice of the “Little Rock Nine” was ultimately short-lived; The district’s high schools closed the following school year, a reaction described as “a physical manifestation for all to see of what that massive resistance looked like,” by the director of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Sherri Lyn Ifill (Associated Press 2017). Ifill offered her disappointment at the immediate and long-term reactions to the historical event: “The imagery of

these perfectly dressed, lovely, serious young people seeking to enter a high school ... to see them met with ugliness and rage and hate and violence was incredibly powerful” (Associated Press 2017:1). Terrence Roberts, now 75 years old, was one of the first African Americans to integrate an all-white school and recognizes the current problems his school district now faces: “To me it’s a testament to the fact that we as a people have been reluctant to have a meaningful conversation about the need for public education. When you look at the history of public education, it’s not surprising at all because public education has always been under the gun” (Associated Press 2017:1). To compare to the 2016-2017 school year, the average black student in Little Rock went to a school that was roughly 14 percent white, 14 percent Hispanic and 68 percent black whereas twenty years ago, a black student in Little Rock would have gone to a school that was 27 percent white, 1.7 percent Hispanic and 70 percent black. Little Rock exemplifies our misunderstanding of history, as well as our country’s recent backsliding (Associated Press 2017). According to Ohio State University historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries, “there has never been a moment where there has not been vociferous resistance to desegregation”. They used to couch it in explicitly racist terms. Now, it’s this sort of colorblind language, but the desire remains the same,” illustrating how conditions today aren’t all that different from the Jim Crow era.

Despite all the legal action taken, states and school districts did little to reduce racial segregation following the Brown v. Board of Education results. None of the legislation clearly spelled out what constituted desegregation or what steps should be taken to end it, as racism at the time was too fundamental to be attacked head-on. School systems that did not favor segregation took advantage of this vagueness, and others simply failed to recognize their own racial disparities, resulting in a lack of progress for any desegregation action. Some southern

districts initially implemented “freedom of choice” plans, which were ultimately designed to discourage any changes by leaving it up to black families to enroll their children in predominantly white schools, which were viciously unwelcoming (Reardon, 2014). Elizabeth Eckford, one of the “Little Rock Nine”, recalled her first day of classes as follows: “The things that people said were shocking. The things that they did, the threats that they made were all terrifying. I was glad I had on those sunglasses, at least some people would not see me crying” (Lowman 2017:5). It became clear that desegregation would come only slowly in the South, but it would also never be fully realized in the northern and western states (Feagin and Barnett 2004). While schools in northern cities weren’t segregated by law, discriminatory housing patterns such as red lining and gentrification fostered racial divides all the same (Klein 2016). Historian Matthew Delmont explains how New York City drove the rhetoric and resistance that allowed school desegregation to falter nationwide; In the late 1950s, years before any serious action was taken to desegregate most schools, New York City parents created the language that would lead opposition to racially mixed schools (Klein 2016). “New York, more than any other place, undercut school desegregation nationally”, Delmont told The Huffington Post, “You can say you’re opposing busing, and that resonated more powerfully, and sounded better and less racist than saying, ‘We don’t want to send our kids to desegregated schools or we don’t want black kids sent to our schools’” (Klein 2016:2). Such reactions prevented racial integration from ever taking form in northern schools. Opposing southern areas worked to get around the laws, while most of the north remained largely unaffected, and any individual white families who disagreed with the laws “voted with their feet” (Lowman 2017). Today in 2017, two out of three black students in New York City attend a school that is 90 to 100 percent minority (Black 2017).

Even with all this legislature put in place to promote desegregation, more than 60 years have gone by and we still haven't gotten it right.

In addition to the initial resistance already mentioned, a slew of key decisions in the 1990's and onward began to reverse many policies targeted at school desegregation. In 1991, the *Board of Education of Oklahoma v. Dowell* case gave courts authority to release schools from maintaining desegregation obligations. In 1992, the *Freeman v. Pitts* case changed the previous effects of the *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County* decision, making it easier for schools to resist segregation without penalty. Again in 1995, the case of *Missouri v. Jenkins* prohibited efforts to attract more white, private school students to inner city public schools that were struggling to desegregate (Orefield and Eaton 1996). Legal and educational institutions had already begun to dismantle the budding new system with decisions that had drastic effects but were ultimately given little attention by the media. Between 1990 and 2010, hundreds of districts that had court-ordered desegregation plans were released from court oversight and these districts became increasingly segregated. In 2007 the Supreme Court's decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* outlawed the "use of students race in voluntarily adopted school assignment plans" making it harder for districts to voluntarily desegregate (Reardon 2014). The list of cases goes on and on, even carrying into this year, when a federal district court judge allowed a predominantly white city in the suburbs of Birmingham, Alabama to move forward in its effort to secede from the school district that serves the larger county: "The district Gardendale is leaving is 48 percent black and 44 percent white. The new district would be almost all white" (Black 2017:1). In this 2017 case, the judge described the motives of the secession as "a desire to control the racial demographics of [its] public schools" by "eliminate[ing]... black students [from] Gardendale schools" , however she "conceded to re-

segregation, speculating that if she stopped the move, innocent parties would suffer: Black students who stayed in Gardendale would be made to feel unwelcome and those legitimately seeking educational improvements would be stymied” (Black 2017:1). These extensive examples of systemic racism explain how we never fully addressed segregation in schools, but instead built around it. While attempts at desegregation in the 1950s to 1970s created a brief period of progressive movements, such efforts need constant renewal for their effects to be maintained overtime, so long as there was no counter pressure forcing change, systemic racism will prevail (Feagin and Barnett 2004). These discriminatory manipulations of the law that followed were creating the appearance of progress while instead reproducing inequality in less detectable forms.

Segregation & Racism Today

The reality of school segregation today is intensely upsetting. Jonathan Kozol, an educator, activist, and most notably, an author of several books investigating public education in the United States, reveals the true tragedy of educational inequality in his work “The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America”. In his ethnographic research of a school district in the South Bronx, he tells the story of Pineapple, a Kindergarten student he followed up with every year to see how her experience unfolded and what her school system was like. He quickly discovered that most of the teachers were unprepared, had never taught before, or did not return after a year. Teachers did very little teaching at all, putting on cartoon shows, demanding complete silence during classroom and recreational hours, and even verbally threatening students. Schools in this area were extremely segregated with the majority of the population being African American students. Kozol (2005) states that “Going to a school in which all of her classmates were Black or Hispanic must have seemed quite natural to her-- ‘the way things are,’ perhaps the way they had always been” and caused her to uncomfortably

wonder what life was like, in her words, “Over there...where other people are” in reference to the predominantly white part of town. These children were so used to being with just their race that they did not even know how “white people behaved” as the only interaction with people of white race was her teachers and principals on occasion. Kozol stated in his analysis that the student he followed, Pineapple, went from being a “lively and resilient little girl” to “depressed” after enduring a school year in which her teacher was replaced 4 times. Kozol went on to explain how at the beginning of the 21st century, “American public schools are now 12 years into the process of continuous resegregation” and how these minority schools, those with mostly Black and Hispanic students, do not have the resources and funding to provide these students with the equal education they deserve” (Kozol 2005:15). Ironically, many of these schools were named after important civil rights leaders, yet they dishonored these figures by providing racially isolated and poor education. He found that all of the schools named activists such as MLK, Rosa Parks, and Thurgood Marshall had populations of 98% African American and Hispanic students, with as little as 2% Whites. In a weak attempt to show progress, even systems with as low as 2% of another race were labeling their school “diverse”. Other schools he studied in his work took brutal, “military like”, totalitarian approaches to discipline students, putting emphasis on state test scores rather than real learning. Schools lacked not only extracurricular activities, but chairs, books, and even clean physical conditions of the buildings. Sadly, it was no wonder that many highly aspirational students he followed lost hope, self-esteem, and in many cases, dropped out entirely.

Kozol’s findings ring true for many areas throughout our country. Since housing segregation is so prevalent in our country, districts are highly stratified by both race and class. Schools are generally supported by local property taxes, leaving students in lower income areas

at far more underfunded and disadvantaged schools. Ample evidence exists that intertwines how various aspects of the school population and surrounding district affect learning outcomes; Reinforcing factors such as the racial/ ethnic composition of the school, poverty level, location in the central city or suburbs, and immigration all impact the student's ability to succeed (J. R. Logan, et al. 2012.). There is also evidence that minority children are more likely than their white counterparts to be in high-poverty schools, which are defined as more than fifty percent poor. Saporito and Sohoni (2007) found that unlike the typical white child, who attends a public school in which most of the children are above the poverty line, the typical black or Hispanic child attends a public school in which most of the children are below the poverty line. Black and Hispanic students are also far more likely to attend inner city schools in which most of the student population is 90 percent black.: "The 24 largest central cities (with 4.5 million students) have enrollments that are more than 70 percent black and Hispanic" (Orfield and Lee 2005). Nationally, high-poverty districts spend 15.6 percent less per student compared to low poverty areas (Semuels 2016). This lack of spending can irreparably damage a child's future, especially for kids from poor families who typically struggle to find the means to further invest in their children's futures. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, a 20 percent increase in per-pupil spending a year for poor children can lead to an additional year of completed education, 25 percent higher earnings, and a 20-percentage point reduction in the incidence of poverty in adulthood. Semuels (2016) looked into a lawsuit filed in 2005, Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) v. Rell, that weighed in on inequality in school funding, in her work "Good Schools, Rich Schools; Bad Schools, Poor Schools.". She cited Violet Jimenez Sims, a Connecticut teacher, who saw the differences between rich and poor school districts firsthand, stating "Without money, there's just a domino

effect.” The teacher emphasized that “students frequently had substitutes because so many teachers got frustrated and left, they didn’t have as much time to spend on computer projects because they had to share computers, and they were suspended more frequently in the poor district,” whereas in the wealthier area, “teachers and guidance counselors would have time to work with misbehaving students rather than expelling them right away” (Semuels 2016). Her examination of the case found that electives, field trips, arts classes, and gifted programs available in wealthier districts had been cut in poorer ones. The lower income schools were comprised of maximum capacity classrooms of 29 students, using 15-20-year-old textbooks, where the windows were duct taped shut and garbage cans were used to collect rain in the hallways (Semuels 2016). These discrepancies are reflected in the high rates of absences and drop-outs that indicate students' overall experiences were far worse than those going to schools in higher income areas. The connection between poor neighborhoods and minority populations are continuously perpetuated by the schools available to them, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and poor education for generations to come.

The widening wealth gaps between white and black families is worsening the outcomes for poor minority children’s educational opportunities. They not only attend worse off schools but lack the external support that middle-class parents provide their children, including access to private tutors, summer enrichment camps, homework support, and the like, that give students an advantage and improve the likelihood of academic success (Lareau 2003). Wealthier families are able to invest more in preparing their children for success in schools from the start, both directly through school resources, and indirectly by emphasizing reading, less TV time, and exposure to culture: “From 1972 to 2006 high-income families increased the amount they spent on enrichment activities for their children by 150 percent, while the spending of low-income

families on enrichment grew by 57 percent” (Murnane and Duncan 2011:11). While educated and higher-class parents are steadily improving their children’s learning abilities and opportunities, programs designed to even the playing field for poorer families, such as Head Start and reduced lunch, are being cut. White children have higher rates of attending private schools, socioeconomically advantaged schools, and smaller schools, which equate to having more resources, individual attention, and an overall superior educational experience. (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Public school students are much more likely to drop out of high school, at about a 24% rate, whereas Catholic or other private school students only have a 12-13% dropout rate (Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore 1982). In these more expensive and exclusion institutions, the strong academic curriculum and homework required is crucial for student achievement, pushing students to their maximum potential and better preparing them for the future (Bryk, Lee and Holland 1993; Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Segregation simultaneously exists in public schools, as Blacks are more likely than Whites to attend schools with larger numbers of low-income students and more racial minorities, and many studies find correlations between the percent minority, or low income, in school and student achievement (e.g., Roscigno 2000). Minority students also often face environmental obstacles, in cities and towns where poverty is concentrated, rates of inter-personal violence tend to be higher, health indicators tend to be more negative, and stress and overall psychological and emotional well-being tends to be substantially worse (Kirp 2011; Noguera 2003). Ironically, despite all these structured inequalities in the types of education received by students of color, numerous researchers have found that black students value education as much as if not more than Whites, making it clear that it is not the individual actions of these students that are holding them back, but the system itself (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; Blau 2003; Cook and Ludwig 1998; Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian 2009;

Mickelson 1990). While it is important to note that not all disadvantaged students are destined to fail, it is clear that their path to success is a far more difficult one compared to white students in better funded areas.

Our country has made strides to improve racial equality overtime, but Americans today have more of a reason to advocate for equality given the tumultuous political climate. Robert Carter, an NAACP lawyer and later a federal judge said of school segregation: “It was not until Brown I was decided that Black were able to understand that the fundamental vice was not legally enforced racial segregation itself; that this was a mere by-product, a symptom of the greater and more pernicious disease— white supremacy” (Feagin and Barnett 2004 7). This “disease” as Carter labels it has resurfaced as a topic of discussion this past year, threatening progress for school segregation even more. Since his election in 2016, Donald Trump and his administration have made questionable remarks about white supremacist groups and their increasingly violent actions, going so far as to say they are “Very fine people” following the violent Charlottesville attacks of this year (Summers 2017). President Trump claimed there was "blame on both sides" of the conflict, taking a softer approach on white supremacist groups such as Neo Nazis and the KKK than he has in his remarks about women, Muslims, and Mexicans (Summers 2017). While these statements shocked and concerned many citizens, others weren't surprised and some even expressed agreement. The Trump administration has shown no signs that they would make the issue of school diversity a priority (Boser 2017). Unfortunately, Trump's Education Department has actually worked to reverse federal action on this issue by ending the Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities grant program, which works to increase socioeconomic diversity among schools. In spite of the Trump administration's recent decision to cut the program, most districts that originally submitted applications for the Opening Doors,

Expanding Opportunities grants are still moving forward with their diversity plans (Boser 2017). School districts in majorly segregated cities such as New York and Los Angeles have recently started implementing programs to integrate their low- and high-poverty schools. Regardless, it is concerning for many citizens of color when their president expresses racist statements and undercuts critically supportive programs.

Impact of Segregated Schools

All of these aspects of a broken system don't just determine what the racial composition of what school looks like, but has prolonged effects on students of color, their white counterparts, and the progress of our society. For many nonwhite students, their schools are setting them up for failure. According to the National Governors' Association, the achievement gap, a gap in academic achievement that persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts, is "a matter of race and class" and "is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges that states currently face" (Ladson-Billings 2016). Some argue that this gap is more of a debt, as government resources have never been invested for black and brown students in the public-school system despite the fact that it was paid for by slave labor (Sumner 2016). These discrepancies in education equality among races are undeniable when comparing relative numbers of student dropout rates, students who take advanced placement examinations, those who enroll in honors, those who receive advanced placement and "gifted" classes, and eventually those who are admitted to colleges and graduate and professional programs (Ladson-Billings 2016). Studies by the Expose Racism & Advance School Excellence initiative found statistical evidence of inequalities and discrimination in U.S. public schools "on every key indicator" noting they were at a "serious disadvantage". They also concluded students of color are suspended or expelled in numbers vastly disproportionate to those of their white

peers, more likely to drop out or be pushed out of school, thus less likely to graduate than are white students, and have less access to advanced classes or programs for gifted students (Gordon 2000). As one teacher described: “You can still walk into a high school in Los Angeles regardless of the color of your skin, but I’ll tell you can’t walk into AP courses and you cannot have the best equipped school, so while the front door is open the classroom door still remains a real, real impactful problem” (Lowman 2017). The message here is that although theoretically students of color might have the same opportunities as white students, the reality of their situation is that they have to jump through many more hoops to keep up.

This achievement gap has serious consequences for students of color outside of the classroom as well. The gap begins before children start school, widens between kindergarten and second grade and is locked in by the third grade, persisting through elementary school, high school, college and ultimately the work force, giving way to an employability gap, an earnings gap, a health care gap, a life expectancy gap, and other quality-of-life gaps (Jackson 2004). School segregation was deeply correlated with the likelihood of a student becoming entangled in the criminal-justice system, often known as the “School to Prison Pipeline”. Berkley professor Rucker Johnson studied black siblings at segregated and desegregated schools, finding not only that the students at integrated schools fared better, but that their children did as well, and this success had absolutely no negative effect of white students in any metric (Oliver 2016). School desegregation is associated with higher graduation rates, greater employability, higher earnings, and decreased rates of incarceration; Higher earnings mean more tax revenue. decreased incarceration means less money spent keeping people in prison, and all of these improvements mean more money for localities (Smith 2016). The evidence of continuing school segregation proves our systems are reproducing racist conditions for future generations: “Without a good

education, many black children are being prepared for the streets, the drug culture, violence, unemployment, prison and death. Without a good education, black children will be unable to compete with the best and brightest students from all parts of the world for jobs in America. Without a good education, black children are not much better off than the slaves that they might be studying during Black history month” (Jackson 2004:5). The lack of action being taken to reduce school segregation means that this cycle of marginalization will continue reproducing inequality at the expense of black students, limit white students understanding of race and racism, and allow for racial biases to be maintained, justified, and repeated. Addressing school segregation is important for minority communities who have been taken advantage of for too long, but it is also vital for breaking down the fierce prejudices that linger in our country today.

The less obvious victims of school segregation are the white students involved. A study of young children in a multiracial preschool found that “white children learn racial differences and how to discriminate at an early age, and that it is by experience, interaction, and education with children of color that they are able to reduce stereotypes and gain a significant opportunity to establish friendships and understanding of others” (Feagin and Barnett 2004:9). One white mother was astonished when her daughter took a racial bias test, recognizing the “good child” as the palest child because it reflected her own image and the “bad child” as the one who was “a lot darker than her” (Oliver 2016). The mom tearfully responded to the footage claiming, “I just think it’s because she’s not exposed”, proving exactly why racial integration is a necessary step for young children of all backgrounds. Kids like that little girl will lose out important lessons if their schools are limited racially and economically. Just as one learns to become racist, learning how to be not racist is also a process, and an integrated school system is the ideal platform for this kind of improvement. It is also important to note that the idea behind desegregation was not

that Blacks needed to sit next to Whites to do better in school, but that the socioeconomic resources and advantages that were present in white schools should be shared among all students. When schools are substantially desegregated, white officials typically spend more money on those schools, so much so that one district official even joked “It was like they wrote a check overnight for a million dollars” when white students were expected to integrate the heavily segregated area (Oliver 2016). And while there is substantial evidence that desegregation by gentrification is beneficial to minority students, there is no evidence that it negatively impacts white students in any way: “School desegregation provides opportunities for all, including Whites, to dismantle historical barriers because students in truly desegregated schools gain opportunities to learn about, and associate with, those with whom they might not otherwise interact” (Feagin and Barnett 2004:15). By keeping our schools segregated, we are not only depriving students of color the chance to succeed, but holding back all students, and our overall society. We could be creating a more accepting, intelligent, and diverse future by breaking down these racial barriers. Desegregating schools isn’t just an improvement for students of color, but also white students, and our overall nation.

While for many white Americans the problem of school segregation is not seen as a pressing issue, this has always been the reality for African American families. Kandice Sumner, a teacher in her hometown’s inner city low income school and a TED Speaker discusses her unique experience with educational “survivor’s remorse” (Sumner 2016). Today, she sees in her students what would’ve been herself if it weren’t for the desegregation busing program METCO implemented in her city (Sumner 2016). Although her Bostonian neighborhood lacked wealth, Kandice’s school in the suburbs provided her with a library, a gymnasium, theater, music classes, science labs, and all the resources she needed for a quality education (Sumner 2016). As she

grew older, she began to notice more disparities in the education her friends at home were getting compared to her own; While Kandice was taking violin lessons, her black peers were struggling with material she had finished 2-3 years prior (Sumner 2016). Her inner-city friends didn't have air conditioning or substantial meals, never mind extracurricular activities, and as Kandice saw firsthand how unequal the system was, she began to question her own deservingness of these amenities (Sumner 2016). She made it her goal to address these issues head on in her career but has become frustrated at her inability to recreate the educational experience she had for her students today (Sumner 2016). She has made huge attempts to improve her kids experiences at school by allocating for investments, heading new reading programs, and often reaching into her own pocket to provide a better-quality education (Sumner 2016). The reactions to her efforts speak volumes about the students' willingness to learn, sense of self identity, and hope for someone to believe in them. Kandice recalls how touched her students were when they received new books donated from strangers, not only because the materials were not hand me downs, but also because they couldn't believe that someone who didn't know them cared so much (Sumner 2016). The biggest message Kandice communicates in her work is that kids take notice of these inequalities; Her five-year-old self did, the students she teaches now do, and these messages are interpreted as a consequence of their racial identity. Equal quality schools are not just important for students of color's academic attainment, but also their sense of self-worth, and in turn, their view of the world.

Attempts for Change

While four out of ten US schools remain "hypersegregated" today, some people like Kandice Sumner have already begun striking back at school segregation (Boser 2017). We are long overdue for change when it comes to educational inequality causing many Americans to

begin taking actions into their own hands in order to fix segregation once and for all. In New York City, the state with the highest levels of intense segregation, students from an array of schools have come together to form the NYC Youth Diversity Council, an organization that fights for better quality for low income schools, and more integration in high income areas (Lowman 2017). These students who felt like they weren't being heard banded together to make their voices louder, forging a path for themselves, by looking at integration as a redistribution of resources. In Arkansas, Jonathon Crossley became principal of Little Rock's lowest performing elementary school in 2015, Baseline Academy, at just 27 years old (Lowman 2017). In two months, he hired and trained forty new teachers in order to completely transform and redesign the school to fit minority students' needs, of whom 40 percent were Latino, 60 percent were African American, many of which were immigrants, and all of which were low income. The school is equipped with funding for meals, basic hygienic needs, trauma support and other necessities for kids coming from unstable homes, but the teachers all agree the what the students need most are people who love them (Lowman 2017). Other school models in places like Boston and Louisville have shown how simple changes like busing and school assignment formulas have become wildly popular, integrating schools more than ever while maintaining 90 percent of parents' top choices for their children (Oliver 2016). There are smaller scale objectives that everyday people can work toward to help make a change. Individual choices that parents make about their children's school, or that teachers make in their classrooms; All of these decisions contribute to the bigger picture of our educational system. We all have the ability to donate time, money, and resources. We can all help vote to change laws and elect officials who will prioritize addressing racial discrepancies in education. We have the power to demand that children of all

racers receive equal opportunities, beginning with better schools. It is time for our democracy to reclaim our power and push an agenda that benefits children of every color and class.

Chanel Smith, a member of Youth United for Change, describes the devastating harm she has experienced as a result of a segregated public education system: “You don’t have support at all. We have a lack of books, resources, anything you can think of”, Smith explains, “When we go in contact with these white children, they don’t know how to act because they believe that they’re better than us, and we don’t know how to act because we believe that they’re better than us, too” (Oliver 2016). There are countless students like Chanel being stripped of their opportunity, promise, and sense of self-worth when they attend schools that are disproportionately low income. Not only are they being set up to fail, they are believing that there is no other option than failure. Their absence in diverse, high quality schools means that their white counterparts are subconsciously learning it too. Henry Der, California Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, spoke of the incredible dedication, resilience, and inspiration that students of color have shown despite a school system that is rigged against them: "It's amazing that we have had so little revolt among students of color. But in spite of all the inequality, the daily stresses of living with the racism of the schools, the young people still have this abiding hope that things will get better” (Gordon 2000). Black children face racism routinely, and the energy loss alone that results from dealing with hostility and discrimination may be enough to account for the remaining differences in school performance of white and black children, but instead exhibits their extraordinary strength (Feagin and Barnett 2004). School segregation is not just a problem of the past, not just a problem for minority groups, and not just a problem that southern conservative states are to blame. It is one of many sources of modern day racial inequality, as it was never correctly implemented, was unraveled by institutionalized racism, and has been at

battle with the continuous racial prejudices still held by many Americans. We need to come to terms with our country's issues, and to do so we must recognize school segregation as a fact, recognize the truth behind our country's history, and recognize that we still have a long way to go until black and brown students truly have equal opportunities. Solving the ongoing issue of segregated schools in our country would not only level the playing field for students of all races, but would help heal our society as a whole, eliminate discrimination for a better future, and create a more prosperous nation.

Data and Methods

During the Fall of 2018, I have conducted an empirical analysis of the situation in the Brockton school district. I chose the town of Brockton because I wanted to connect my project to a local cause, and also because a big misconception about school segregation is that it is primarily an issue for red/southern states (Chokshi 2014). I used a mixed methods approach, gathering primary data from teachers, parents, and former students, as well as collecting secondary data on enrollments, dropout rates, and other relevant parameters for the Brockton public school system to compare these findings with other schools in largely segregated areas to see if their efforts have made a difference. My primary data allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the problem, its impact on the community, and strategies used for mitigating this problem. I have conducted in-depth interviews of consenting teachers, parents, and former students from the Brockton area. These interviews have helped me interpret data trends, as well as the mechanisms through which the problem has persisted, affects people, and is being dealt with. I applied for and have received IRB approval for this planned research on 9/15/18.

The interviews conducted asked participants about opinions and experiences with the role of race within the Brockton public school system. The process of findings members of the

Brockton Community went differently than I had originally expected. My initial plan was to interview consenting teachers, parents, and administrators within the schools, but after sending out my solicitation email, I received an unexpected response. In order to do any research work within the school itself, I would have had to go through a separate application process for the Brockton administration to review, and the dates of acceptance did not correlate with my time frame for the project. With this knowledge in mind, I decided to expand my scope of participants to include former students who had gone to Brockton schools, with IRB approval. I reached out to an array of community members using my own networks and ended up gathering my data with a snowball sampling approach. I found that students were the most willing to participate in the project, and their responses yielded more content than many of the parents and teachers I reached out to. While I realize that adults lead busy lives and may have less time to schedule an interview, many students also juggle classes, jobs, and extracurricular activities. The students from Brockton were very comfortable discussing the topic of race, and generally had a lot to say regarding their earlier years of education. I conducted interviews over the course of the Fall semester of 2018. I had a total of fifteen respondents, nine who were former students, and six who were teachers, parents, or both. The interviews were recorded with consent from participants, then later transcribed so as to keep any identifiable information anonymous. I looked for major patterns within the responses to analyze the work Brockton has put into creating racial equality for their students.

| <u>Respondent #</u> | <u>Role</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Gender</u> | <u>Race</u> |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Former Student | 20 | Female | Black |
| 2 | Former Student | 22 | Female | Black |
| 3 | Former Student | 18 | Female | White |
| 4 | Former Student | 24 | Male | Asian |
| 5 | Former Student | 18 | Male | White |
| 6 | Former Student | 20 | Male | White |
| 7 | Former Student | 22 | Male | Black |
| 8 | Former Student | 23 | Female | White |
| 9 | Former Student | 25 | Male | Black |
| 10 | Teacher | 26 | Female | White |
| 11 | Teacher/ Former Student | 30 | Female | Black |
| 12 | Teacher | 37 | Female | White |
| 13 | Teacher/ Parent | 31 | Female | White |
| 14 | Teacher | 35 | Male | Black |
| 15 | Teacher/ Parent | 43 | Female | White |

Findings

Policies in Massachusetts

Unlike many other areas, Massachusetts made state level changes following the Brown v. Board of Education case, initiating programs like the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity and magnet schools to aid desegregation efforts. In 1965, Massachusetts passed the Racial Imbalance Act and the METCO, Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, program was established in 1966 with the aim of voluntarily transferring students from low-performing schools in the cities of Boston and Springfield to the high-performing schools in the surrounding suburbs (Ayscue et al. 2013). Unfortunately, many of these policies were quietly undercut rather than expanded upon, causing many areas to re-segregate: “In Massachusetts, a shift toward more race-neutral factors was already occurring in several locations; for example, in 1998 *Wessman v. Gittens* prohibited Boston’s specialty high schools from using race-based affirmative action [...] In the late 1990s, the state’s Department of Education eliminated the Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity, which had overseen desegregation efforts [...] In 2001, the state eliminated the incentives that had been previously provided to school districts that chose to adopt desegregation plans” (Ayscue et al. 2013). The figures mentioned in the “Losing Ground: School Segregation in Massachusetts” report illustrate this change overtime, and their analysis of various studies prove that school segregation is detrimental in every measure, from academic performance to classroom behavior to the ability to move on from the schools at all. Their work emphasizes the lower standards set for segregated schools, in areas such as “less experienced and less qualified teachers, high levels of teacher turnover, less successful peer groups, and inadequate facilities and learning materials” (Ayscue et al. 2013). The report also

highlights how beneficial diverse schools are for children of all races, not only nonwhite students. The end discussion calls for policy changes at all levels; local, state, and federal.

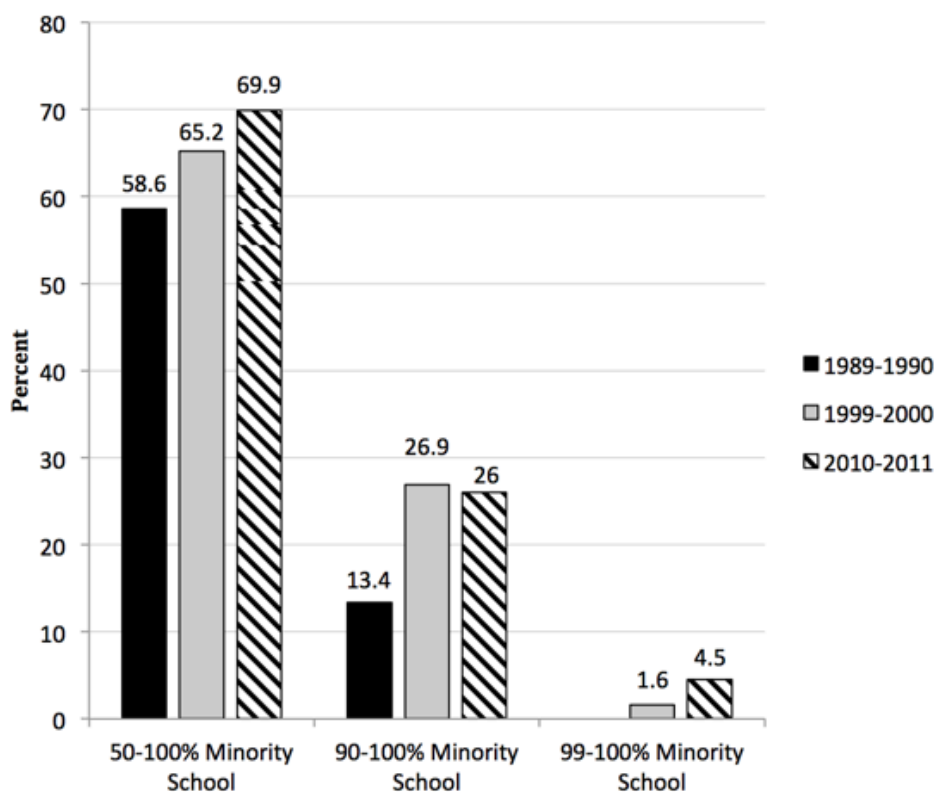
Table 5 – *Multiracial and Minority Segregated Schools,
Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton Metropolitan Area*

| | Total Schools | % of Multiracial Schools | % of 50- 100% Minority Schools | % of 90- 100% Minority Schools | % of 99- 100% Minority Schools |
|--|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Boston-Worcester- Lawrence-Lowell- Brockton Metro | | | | | |
| 1989-1990 | 1404 | 10.1% | 10.8% | 1.4% | NS |
| 1999-2000 | 1477 | 16.6% | 17.9% | 4.5% | 0.4% |
| 2010-2011 | 1421 | 16.6% | 24.7% | 8.3% | 0.8% |

Note: NS = No Schools. Multiracial schools are those with any three races representing 10% or more of the total student enrollment.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

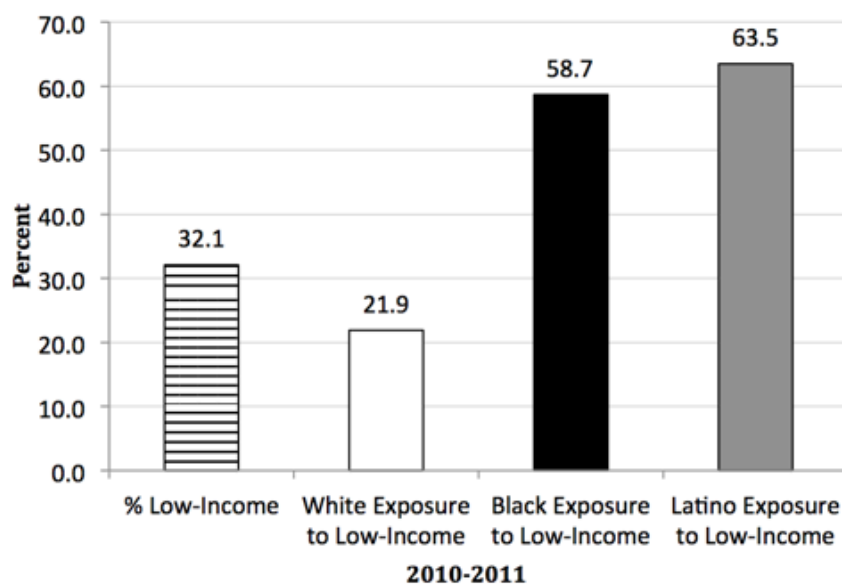
Figure 11 – *Black Students in Minority Segregated Schools, Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton*



Note: Minority school represents black, Latino, American Indian, and Asian students.

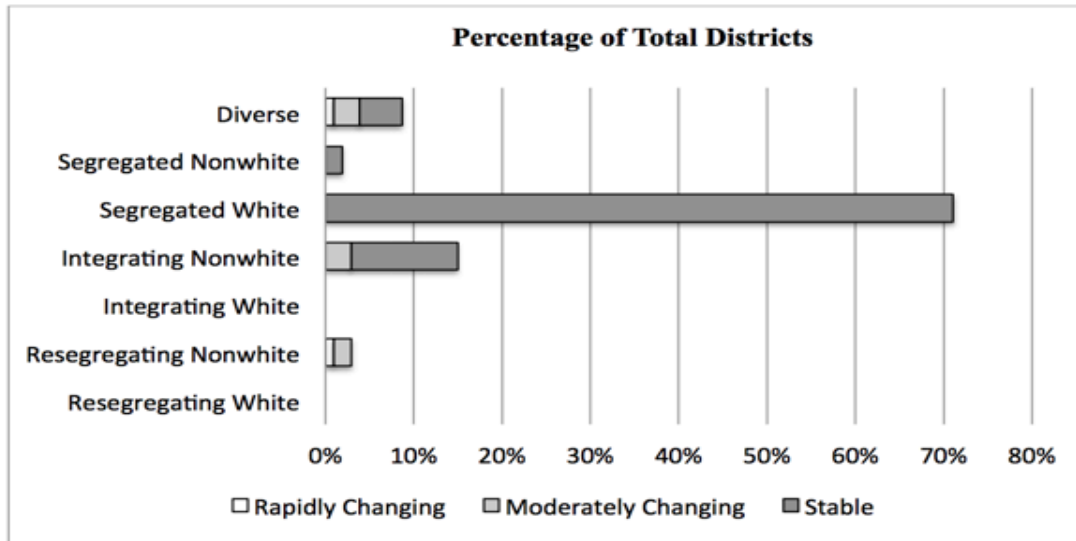
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

Figure 18 – *Exposure to Low-Income Students by Race, Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton Metropolitan Area*



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

Figure 20 – Degree and Type of Racial Transition,
Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton Metropolitan Area, 1999 to 2010



Note: N=207 districts for 1989, 1999 and 2010 with greater than 100 students enrolled across the three time periods. For the degree of change categories: Rapidly changing districts are those with white % change 3 times greater than metro white % change. Moderately changing districts are those with white student % change 2 times but less than 3 times greater than metro white % change, or those that experienced a white % change less than 2 times the metro white % change but classified as predominantly white, nonwhite or diverse in the earlier time period and classified as a new category in the later period. Stable districts are those that experienced a white % change less than 2 times the metro white % change. For the type of change: Resegregating districts are those classified as predominantly white, nonwhite or diverse in the earlier time period and classified as the other predominantly type in the later period. Integrating districts are those classified as predominantly white or nonwhite in the earlier time period and diverse in the later period. Segregated districts are those classified as predominantly white or nonwhite in both time periods. Diverse districts are those classified as diverse in both periods.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data

The data reported above puts into perspective how Massachusetts has backtracked on its desegregation efforts, and the various impacts this has on different racial groups. Table 5 and Figure 11 illustrate how from the late 1980's to the early 2000s, school segregation has increased among Massachusetts schools as improving programs were cut and undone. Figure 18 emphasizes how this resegregation left Blacks and Latinos more than twice as likely to be exposed to low income, impoverished student bodies. Figure 20 shows how difficult racial transition has become in recent years, as the vast majority of segregated schools are stable and

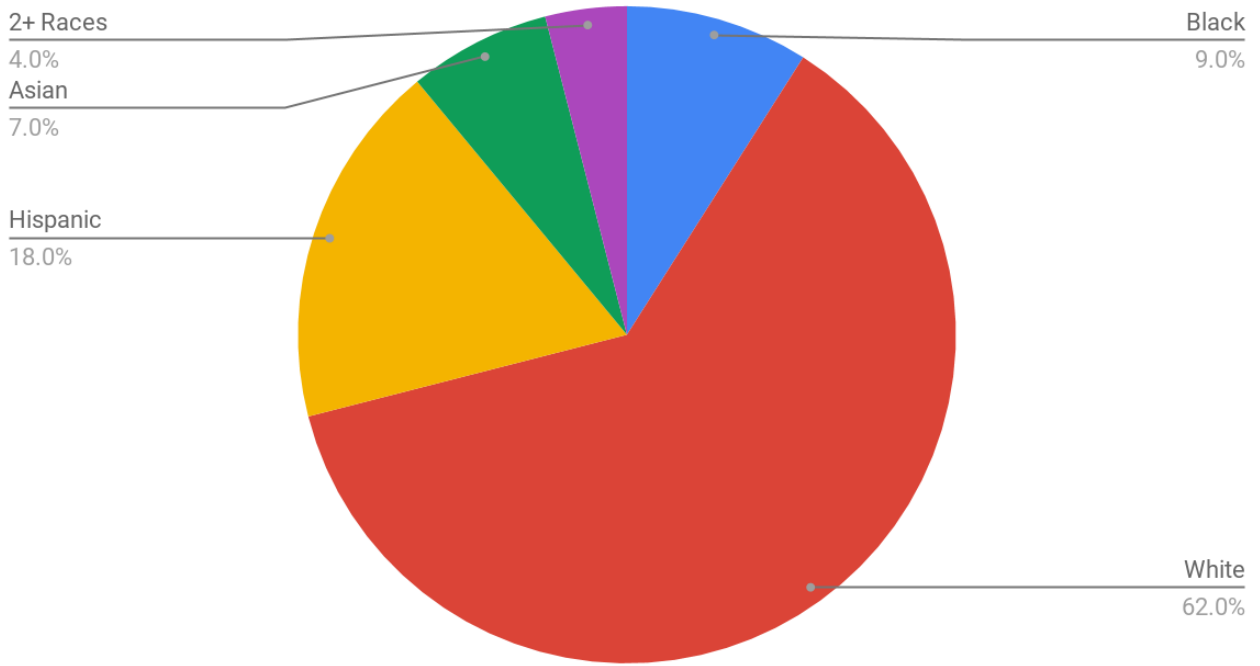
unchanging. These charts are only a few of the parameters that measure the result of continuing segregation, and how it is worsening as time goes on.

Brockton Public Schools

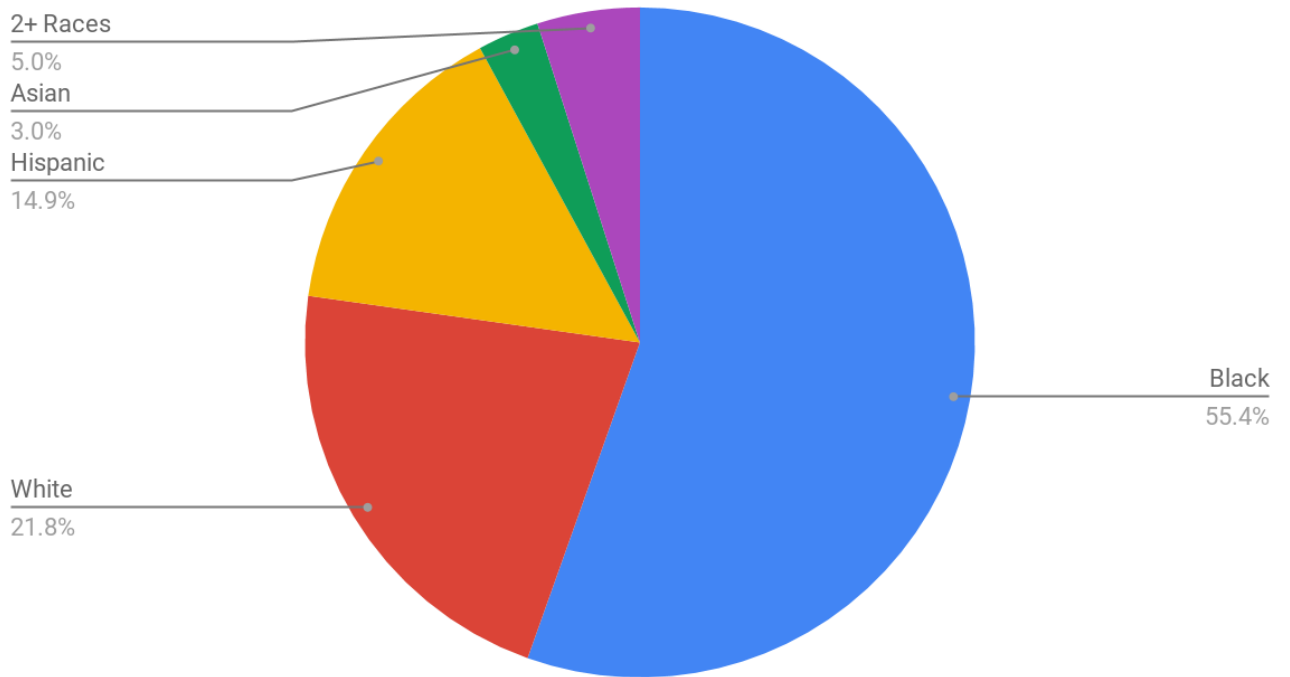
One of the areas that has been working to combat this pervasive issue through the years is Brockton Massachusetts. Brockton's population rapidly grew in the 1970's, increasing the demand for local resources. In response to this growth, the town heavily invested in its public education, updating and building schools from 1952 through the 70's, resulting in a more large and modernized system (Carroll 1989). Their new high school for example was equipped with a planetarium, swimming pool, theater, sports facilities, and even a student-run restaurant (Carroll 1989). These investments planted the seeds for a strong focus on education that would later make the town a leader in progressive schooling. Reformative plans such as controlled choice have been adopted by some public-school systems, including Brockton, in order to better maintain equality among the student populations (Willie and Alves 1996). Brockton adopted a plan that divided its schools into two zones, equivalent in quality and range of educational offerings, as well as a renovated K-8 magnet school, and priority of assignment in accordance with racial fairness guidelines. The Brockton Desegregation planning team said in their draft report that the town was "well positioned to enter a new educational era in full conformity with public laws and in full pursuit of excellence without compromising equity" (Willie and Alves 1996). Brockton also adopted Controlled Choice programs in efforts to equalize and reduce classroom size across different neighborhoods and went from having class sizes ranging from thirteen to forty in 1995, to an average class size of twenty-six in every elementary classroom (Willie and Alves 1996). The 2018 "A New Wave of School Integration" outlined five major sources of integration they found worked, including attendance zone boundaries, district-wide choice policies, magnet

school admissions, charter school admissions, and transfer policies, many of which Brockton's public-school system has adopted (Potter, et al. 2018). Their hard work has proved to pay off in some measure. In a PBS news interview from 2016 questioning how to solve stubborn school segregation, UCLA Professor Pedro Noguera highlighted Brockton as a beacon of hope for other segregated areas "What Brockton shows us — it's the largest high school in the state, 4,200 students — that by focusing on the student needs, you can, even without moving them, create a school that's the pride of the community. Brockton is one of the only urban high schools in the state of Massachusetts that gets a level one rating. And that's because over one-third of their senior class gets the highest possible test score in the state. And the demographics of the kids who get that score match the demographics of the school" (Noguera 2016). When asked to elaborate on the districts techniques and focus, Noguera (2016) responded "The school. They make sure that every teacher, regardless of the subject they teach, is a teacher of literacy, whether it be science, or math, or art, or music". To look into these methods and the overall progress of the Brockton public schools, I interviewed a series of teachers, parents, and former students involved in the system to hear their takes on the current situation.

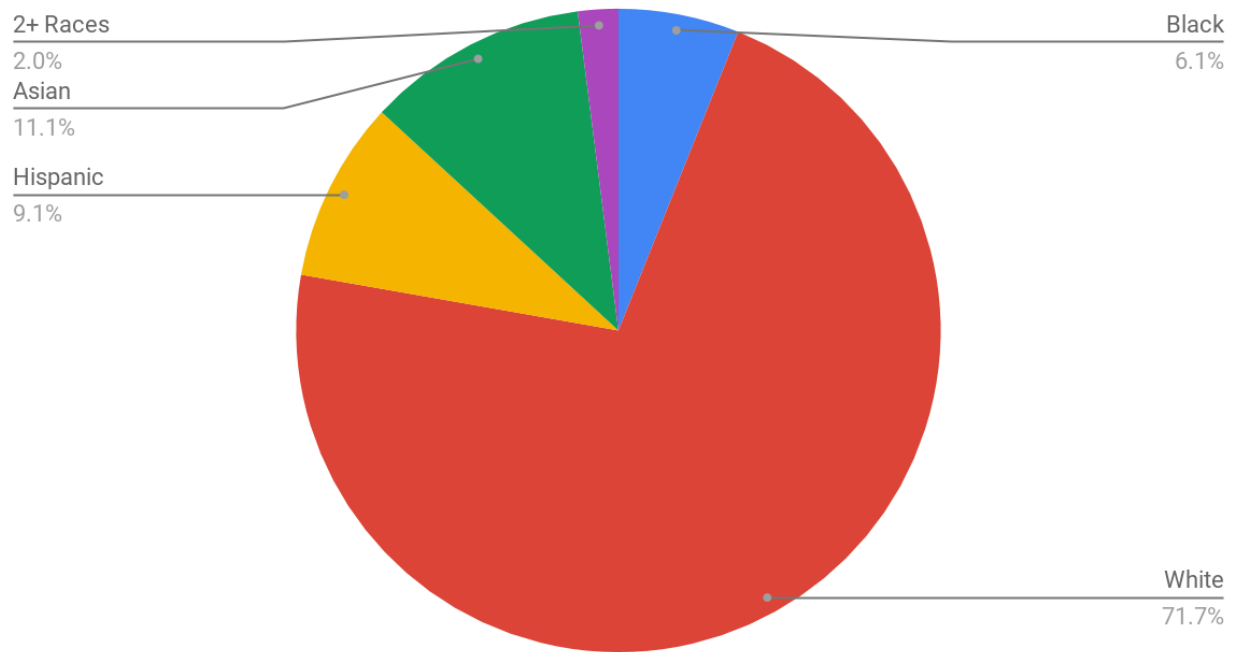
While Massachusetts has falling behind in terms of racial equality in schools, the city of Brockton has been working to create a better opportunity for all races in their area. I first collected secondary data comparing the Brockton public school district to the average Massachusetts public school district, so see how it compares to the rest of the state. I created the graphs below to help visualize the differences how Brockton stands out from the rest of the state. The following pie charts explain how Brockton is more diverse not only within its student body, but within crucial populations such as AP classes and Gifted/Talented Programs compared to the average Massachusetts school.



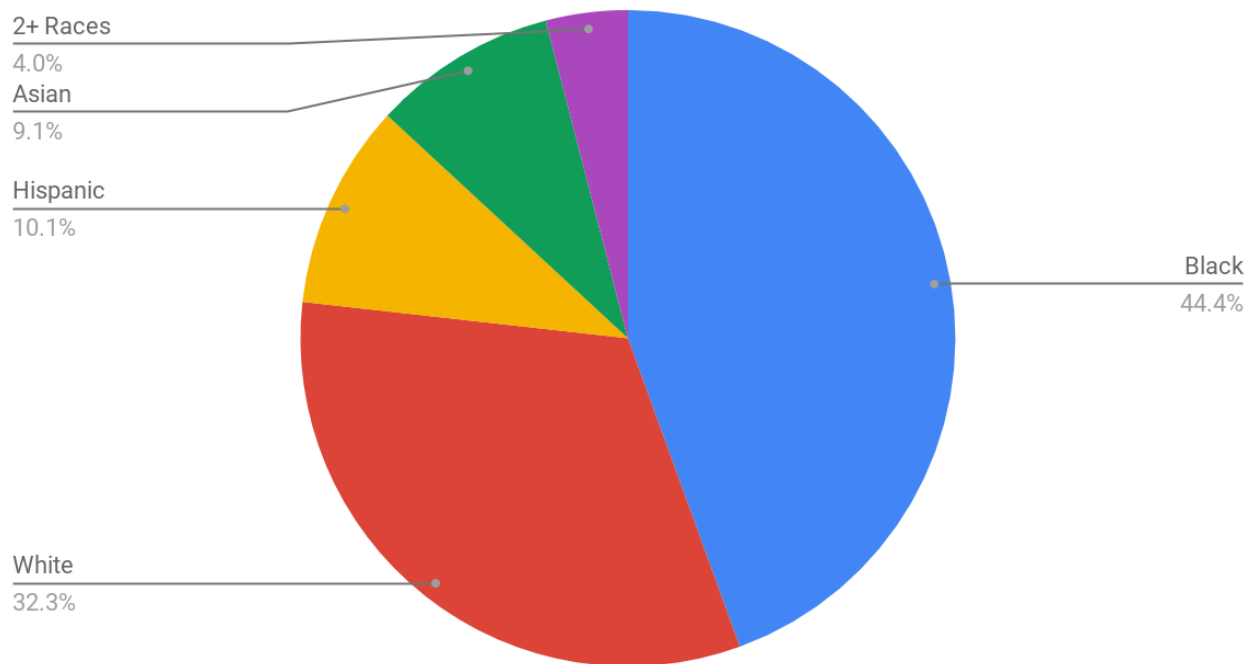
Racial Composition of Massachusetts Schools



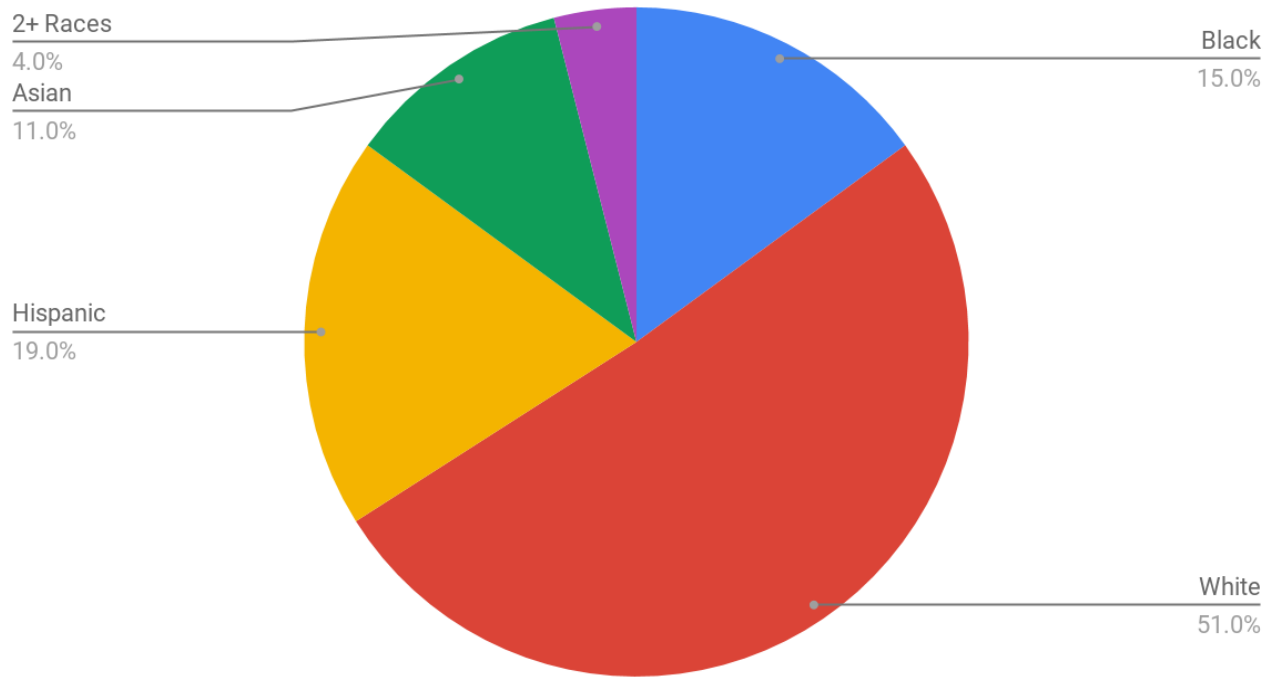
Racial Composition of Brockton Schools



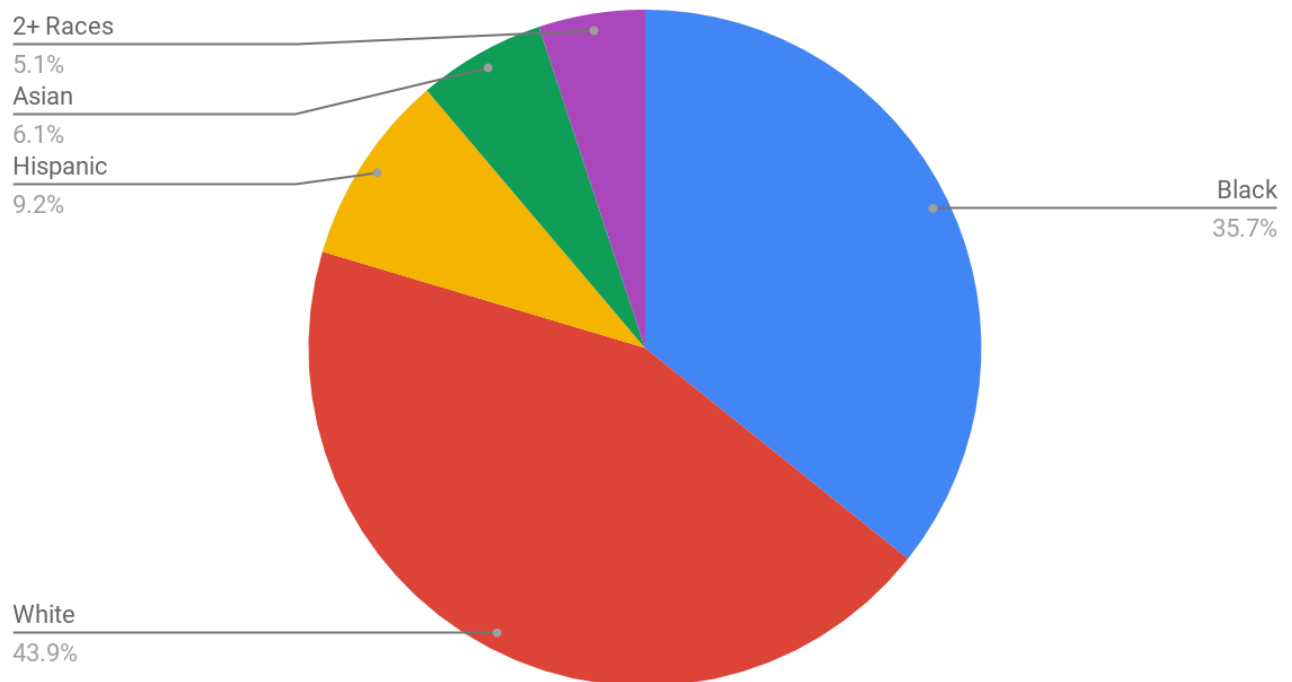
Racial Composition of Massachusetts AP Courses



Racial Composition of Brockton AP Courses



Racial Composition of Massachusetts Gifted/Talented Programs



Racial Composition of Brockton Gifted/Talented Programs

Available trends based on civil rights data released by the U.S. Department of Education indicate that because Brockton is comprised of a more diverse student body compared to its average Massachusetts counterpart, there is thus more inclusion of races in AP courses, gifted and talented programs, and other important measures. The Brockton system is clearly better able to accommodate their diverse groups students, as they are more represented in higher level classes than other Massachusetts schools. According to ProPublica, an interactive database that examines racial disparities in US education, Brockton exhibits more racial equality structurally, academically, and in terms of discipline. The data indicated that segregation in the area between Black students and White students is “Low, indicating that the distribution of these two racial groups among schools in this district is relatively even”. In Massachusetts overall, Black students are 4 times as likely to be suspended as White students, whereas in Brockton, Black students are only 1.7 times as likely to be suspended as White students. Brockton’s rate of graduation was also as high as 90 percent, which speaks volumes compared to other urban areas. With greater diversity, opportunity, and equality, on paper Brockton seems to be far ahead of other schools in the state that continue to experience severe segregation.

Mechanisms For Diversity

My primary research surrounding the role of race in the Brockton public schools generally reaffirmed the positive findings of these secondary data trends. Every single one of my respondents agreed that Brockton was very diverse, and that this was a strength of their system in many ways. One of the major findings I discovered was that the high school, Brockton High, was the most diversified of all the schools because of how it is set up geographically. Brockton High is the only high school in the public system, therefore all of the students, and all of the funding,

are going to the same place. A lifelong community member and current teacher in the city put it this way: “Brockton has always been a very diverse community and has had influences from all races. This has forced Brockton to become an inclusive system, unlike surrounding districts with less diversity. Brockton, as a whole, embraces the diversity and provides programs and events that showcase the diversity of the community”. Her comments exemplify how the community of culture the city has fostered overtime is now reflected in the schools naturally, which was accurate for many of the students I spoke with. One student felt the school administration efforts are now focused on including their large and unique population: “Honestly, I feel like it’s kind of inevitable to have the diversity because it’s the only huge high school you can go to. I do think that they do put effort towards it but it’s kind of bound to happen ... I would say that because of how big it is its not segregated and within the school they work to make races more equal”¹. Other former students agreed that the single high school made for forced mixing of races, saying “I’d say from my experience it kind of just so happens that the student population is diverse. There’s just the one high school so it just kind of works out that way”². A BHS graduate explained how the school’s structure is able to be more inclusive than other higher education institutions, “I think it’s set up to be diverse the way that they have it, they know that all these different people from the community are coming in so it’s definitely easier than at like a college for example where they might be picking and choosing different kids. So, they do a good job. There’s so many kids there that it just works out that we have little bit of everything, but they do make sure to not turn anyone away”³. In terms of the lower level schools, there are more options for where to go, as Brockton has multiple elementary and middle schools. There are still some

¹ S/F/B/1 (Student/Female/Black/Respondent #1)

² S/F/B/2

³ S/M/B/7

systems in place to prevent segregation for younger students, as one parent and teacher recalled the progressive process of signing children up for their first years, “I think that when students enroll for kindergarten they are no longer placed in the school closest to their home. They are able to choose their top choices and fill out a form and then are placed in a school. While most students do live in the surrounding area, we also have students who are not in closest proximity to the school and I believe this allows for greater diversity”⁴. When asked about any indication of segregation, one parent and lunch room monitor mentioned “I think at the lower levels for certain populations this could exist, but it gets more diverse at the higher levels, and isn’t an overall problem”⁵. Another student agreed that within the system, the high school does the best job at including all the races that make up the city of Brockton: “I think diversity varies on the level, because in elementary school and middle school there was often more white people in the classrooms. But still, we obviously had a big Cape Verdean population, a lot of Haitians, and other races mixed in. At the high school level it definitely skyrocketed, I remember my freshman year I was one of the fewer white students in my homeroom”⁶. The inclusion of so many different community members was a hallmark of the school, as one teacher noted “Our student body is all over the map. We have students that are from Cape Verde we have students from Haiti, we have students from France, Portugal, Cambodia, so it’s everywhere, any type of race or background you can think of we have it at Brockton High”⁷. When speaking about the diversity of their school system, students, teachers, and parents not only gave positive feedback, but expressed great pride for their city.

⁴ T/F/W/10

⁵ P/F/W/15

⁶ S/M/W/6

⁷ T/F/B/11

Integrated School Experience

Many of the students aren't or were not aware of school segregation until leaving the Brockton system because it wasn't something they experienced. While awareness of racial disparities in education is very important, the fact that the majority of these students were generally unaware of school segregation speaks volumes to their own experience in the Brockton system, indicating that their overall experience at the school was one of equality and fairness. Six of the eleven students I spoke with were unaware that segregation in schools remained a modern-day issue. When asked about the topic, a student who had moved on to higher education explained, "I've definitely become more aware of it. At the time that I was in the Brockton system I wasn't aware of it because I saw a lot of different people but when I got to college, it was still very diverse, but I began to hear a lot of other people's experiences who had never gone to school with people from here or there. For example, we have a very high Cape Verdean population in Brockton but some people who were in my college didn't even know what background that is because they had never gone to school with a Cape Verdean"². Her experience with other college students made her more aware of how unique Brockton is in terms of exposure to racially diverse populations. Other students shared similar experiences about their awareness of school segregation, or lack there-of. One student claimed "I mostly know [about segregation] from being in college and classes I've taken"¹. Another emphasized how participating in this project was his first encounter with the issue, "I never really thought about school segregation as something that's not just a part of history. So, I'm glad you've brought this to my attention because it's definitely something I want to do some of my own research on and know more

² S/F/B/2

¹ S/F/B/1

about. When I was in school it was not something I was effected by”⁸. While awareness is always a good thing, the fact that school segregation was so far from many of the former student’s radars indicated that Brockton’s efforts in combating the issue have been successful.

Comparisons to Surrounding Areas

All of the interview participants agreed that their school was better off compared to surrounding districts in terms of racial diversity and equality. Former students who were familiar with other schools spoke highly of Brockton in comparison. One student who left Brockton High and came back after one year said “Its definitely more diverse [than other areas]. The school I went to freshman year was Boston Arts Academy, there was only 400 kids. I guess you could say it was a little diverse but not as much as Brockton, there wasn’t really that many people and it was kind of the same people, just minorities and stuff like that. Because Brockton is so big we definitely combat segregation better”¹. Another student who moved halfway through high school shared his experience, “I went to a different school for my last few years of high school and there was a culture shock definitely. I went from a big city to a smaller town with a little more money than Brockton. So, I definitely noticed a lot of differences, it was a smaller school with only about 1,200 kids. There was more funding to go around, I could see that with more up to date materials and more substitute teachers. But in terms of race it was completely the opposite of Brockton, where the minority races were definitely the minority, it was a lot more segregated”⁹. Other students had similar things to say about surrounding areas, citing friends who went to all White or all Black schools that were different from theirs. As one student put it, “I have a couple friends who live outside the area, and their high schools are much more troubled, even violent.

⁸ S/M/B/9

¹ S/F/B/1

⁹ S/M/W/5

Going to Brockton you think that the way things are is just normal, obviously every city has its bad parts, but inside the school system is more of a sanctuary. So it doesn't reflect those bad parts of the community like other schools sometimes do, it's actually the opposite"⁸. Another BHS graduate discussed how the comparative diversity at her school made her a more well-rounded and informed student, saying "I notice that many of the smaller towns do not have as much of a diverse student population. I found that growing up in a diverse school system at such a young age helped eliminate societal prejudice and racism that is present in some of my elders and fellow Caucasian students. It was only when I went to college and started meeting people from surrounding towns that I realized how unusual it was to attend such a diverse school population. Other students were not as fortunate and are susceptible to influence by their parents and fall ignorant to their own compliance with racism and prejudice"¹⁰. Community members not only agreed that their school was more advanced than other local districts, but that it had important repercussions for the future.

Specialized Programs and Extracurricular Supports

In terms of how Brockton schools accommodate their unique population, many respondents cited great academics and extracurricular activities that the school provides, as well as pushing further higher education. More than half of the participants mentioned an array of clubs and organizations that were designed for minority students, as summarized by one teacher "They have clubs and groups that meet after school like the Haitian Club or the Cape Verdean club, stuff like that, but they are open to every race and culture, so you don't have to belong to one of those races to be in that particular club. It is mixed within the groups, and mixes friendships. So, we don't have anything in place from administration and we don't really need

⁸ S/M/B/9

¹⁰ S/F/W/8

anything but those more informal groups are great”⁷. The impact of these groups benefited the sense of acceptance and belonging for many members, as a student noted “Brockton does a great job in combating school segregation. They offer many after school programs and activities to try to intervene and provide equal opportunity to all students. The teachers are very active in them as well, so then there is little racial favoritism or bias amongst the teachers”⁶. The existing informal social clubs and programs helped students connect across cultures and become more unified. One student explained “ They definitely have cape Verdean and Asian programs and international students, they have programs for them to help them grow and adapt to the community. There’s a lot of stuff that is actively involving people of different racial backgrounds. I think to some extent it is effective because honestly it kind of helps everyone come together and find your place”³. Not too many people could recall administrative policies that worked to combat segregation aside from the geographic districting but didn't think they needed to be implemented. Many respondents agreed that while a preventative system in place wouldn’t hurt, there was simply no immediate need. There are also a lot of opportunities for bilingual students, included special courses, programs, and personnel that speak multiple languages, and some students said that added to their experience and ability to adjust to the school. Two of the teachers I spoke to were familiar with the systems SEI, or secondary English immersion classes, and one explained how this works to benefit students who don’t primarily speak English; “In the elementary school that I work at, we offer SEI classrooms where non-English speaking students may have better access to information. Imagine coming to America for the first time and having limited English knowledge and being placed into a fourth-grade classroom and not knowing anything that’s

⁷ T/F/B/11

⁶ S/M/W/6

³ S/M/B/7

going on and you can't communicate effectively to tell anyone you do not understand. Each SEI classroom has a paraprofessional that speaks Creole and is able to relay information to students who require some translation. Students are still being exposed to English but are able to follow along a little easier"⁴. The special attention given to these minority students and their families was indicative of a lot of the practices in place at Brockton. The other teacher added that compared to other areas "Brockton is far more advanced when it comes to second language learners"¹¹. Formal programs like SEI and informal programs like clubs and after school groups help unite students across languages, cultures, and abilities.

Social Integration

Students and teachers also mentioned that groups intermingle between races and there isn't much social segregation either. People mentioned being able to communicate well with other races is a huge advantage as a result of the system. A former student and current teacher in the Brockton system told a story that explained the improving social factors of integrated schools, "When I was in high school it was still a diverse high school but there was still a little bit of separation between cultures. So, for instance for myself, all of my friends were white, and I was the only black girl in the group. It's funny because I went to a school that had a bunch of people who look like me and I was the only one who didn't look like me in my group of friends, so it's gotten better because now it's an entire mixture of different cultures and different cultures definitely mix in with each other"⁷. Her example showed the continuing progress of Brockton, which many students now cite as being very mixed socially as well as academically. One student compared it to other areas that are primarily one race or the other, stating, "I would say Brockton

⁴ T/F/W/10

¹¹ T/M/B/14

⁷ T/F/B/11

probably is a bit better off because in a lot of surrounding towns they may have a diverse group but people kind of only mingle with their own race. You would never find that in Brockton”¹⁰.

Another student gave the example of the cafeteria at lunch hour to explain the racial integration that occurs socially at Brockton, “Take lunch for example, when you see the lunchroom it wasn’t really like all the white kids sit together and all the black kids sit together, for the most part everyone was getting along and there was never really a racial divide, everyone was very cool with each other. I think that’s part of what Brockton teaches you, Brockton people have this sense of comradery, we all just get together no matter what skin color anyone is. It’s very mixed”³. The responses made it clear that for the most part, racial groups were integrated socially, as well as academically.

Reported Racial Divides

The only instances of racism that were cited were interpersonal issues. Only two students recalled instances of racial profiling but mentioned that they were more personally mediated rather than systemic. One student made a comment that reflected the secondary data surrounding disciplinary measures, stating “I think in a sense there is some stuff that goes on in the Brockton public schools, there are some racial issues that occur, but I feel like it’s more interpersonal. Behaviorally and personally there’s some targeting, in high school it was more the black men who were targeted, any little thing that they did was typical for teenagers they would get in more trouble for”¹. The impact of race on students’ experiences is noted as more related to their home life or the political climate as opposed to any sort of issues at or within the school. When asked how the role of race functions in a classroom, one teacher responded, “Based on my experience

¹⁰ S/F/W/8

³ S/M/B/7

¹ S/F/B/1

as a teacher, a students' race does not have an impact on their educational or personal experience, but their culture and socioeconomic status do"¹². Another teacher added "Some cultures are more strict than others in regard to education. Home life is the touchy subject when it comes to educational and personal experiences"¹¹. While race didn't have an impact on students inside the classroom or within the school, their different backgrounds remained indicators of success. One of the BHS teachers explained, "For instance, if you come from Haitian culture you're known to have strict parents who are involved and helpful and keep on top of their grades, and we have an issue where there is a lack of support from parents in the Cape Verdean culture. Therefore, a lot of cape Verdean students have issue with their grades compared to Haitian students, but it is not necessarily as a result of their skin color"⁴. Values and tendencies varied by race and did in turn effect student's outcomes, but their experience at school generally was not slanted in any way by their racial identity

Faculty Assistance

Teachers were labeled as giving all of their students every resource needed to succeed. The teachers and guidance counselors, specifically at BHS, were a source of motivation for many former students, as one noted, "Definitely, the good thing about the school system is that the teachers are also diverse, so you get teachers from all different cultures and countries and stuff, so they really understand how to create a level playing field for everyone. I think that really helps, it makes for mutual respect"⁸. Aside from being reflective of the student body, faculty made great efforts toward creating equal opportunity for their students, as the same student elaborated "They make a huge effort to make sure everyone absorbs cultural knowledge and

¹² T/F/W/13

¹¹ T/M/B/14

⁴ T/F/W/10

⁸ S/M/B/9

understandings. The teachers there will really send you on the right path. I was very good friends with my guidance counselor, she was great and she helped me with the college readiness program. So, there's also a lot of programs that help you transition to your next step after high school, and that really empowers all the different students"³. Many students had positive remarks for their past teachers and the hopeful futures presented to them, as one college student mentioned "It was at Brockton that I heard community college was even an option for low cost higher education. So, they definitely work to make sure that everyone even people from low income areas have opportunities to further their education, they tell you about all kinds of scholarships and I just feel that they really do everything in their power to make sure, since they know Brockton has more low-income student population, they really try to cater to everyone"². This introduction to higher education was not unique to one race, and all students are given the chance to succeed after high school, as one student put it, "The push for post high school education is something that all students are greeted with. The teachers often work with the guidance counselors and they hold sessions together, they make time for all the students and make them aware of all the different resources they have. They treat all the students as friends in a way, no matter who they are or where they come from. I would say that the students are really motivated by all of the inclusiveness and help available around them"³. It was clear that the faculty's agenda was to prepare their students for life beyond Brockton public schools, and that they succeeded in many ways, especially considering the large high school population.

Push for Equality

³ S/M/B/7

² S/F/B/2

³ S/M/B/7

Most participants noted that the school's greatest strength was that it pushed equal opportunity for all students. When asked whether or not the school administration put effort towards equal opportunity for all races, one student replied "100%. This is something that I pride Brockton on. I remember extended day as a kid and in elementary school being made aware of the importance of learning and grades. My teachers would mention programs they thought might suit their students and they would make an active effort to try to help the struggling students catch up"¹⁰. Another student recalled someone in his grade who excelled in Brockton despite being an immigrant, "I mean, we had one kid in my graduating class who was Haitian and he got a full ride to Harvard, you look at something like that and think wow, this person wasn't even born in our country, he came over and was able to have so much success thanks to our school". As the secondary data indicates, Brockton's diversity carries into more advanced classes, which was mentioned by another student who said, "I think the class structures even at the higher levels, you see a lot of diversity, like in honors and AP classes, so that was a positive. I knew a lot of kids who went to other schools and they saw mostly white kids in those classes"¹². The existing opportunities for all students, regardless of race, was a big point of conversation in many of the interviews.

Areas for Improvement

In terms of what respondents would change about the system, not many race related concepts came up. Any changes they would make addressed common issues for many schools, such as overemphasis on testing, which two teachers mentioned, and having more advisors and counselors with fewer students assigned, which is a natural issue for larger schools lacking funding. The only changes addressed at improving racial inequality came from two students who

¹⁰ S/F/W/8

¹² S/M/A/4

wished the curriculum taught more about racism as a modern day issue as opposed to a historical one. One noted, “I guess I would encourage more to be taught about modern society so that students can know a bit more about race in a modern light. When I was in school we learned about racism as a thing of a past, in that regard I would definitely change things to give a better outlook on the world they’re going into. But other than that, I wouldn’t really change anything”². Many participants struggled to name weaknesses or things they would change about the Brockton system, which illustrates how much progress they have made compared to the rest of the state and country.

Long-Term Impact of Integration

The greatest impact of the school system which many of the respondents brought up was being able to socialize and interact with many different races. Students especially mentioned how their transition to higher education was made easier because they were comfortable around all different types of people. A lifelong Brockton student said “A particular strength from the diversity is that people who come from Brockton high never really feel uncomfortable with different people, since you’ve been around them for so long you just kind of see it as just another person”⁹, expressing how the presence of other races positively affected him, adding “When you are among a group of diverse people, so much more learning can occur and not just in the classroom but also how much we can learn from each other and someone else’s experiences”. Another participant similarly stated that the integration of the school was a positive factor, saying, “My personal experience with the role of race in the classroom is that it felt just like a normal classroom. Anybody of different races didn’t bother me because it was fun, and it was

² S/F/B/2

⁹ S/M/W/5

different. Different in a good way”⁶. Due to the mixing of so many races and cultures, students of color did not feel not intimidated by or inferior to their white counterparts, and the societal stereotypes of minority races were not reflected in their eyes. White students in turn expressed great respect and comradery with their fellow nonwhite students, especially those who had experiences at other schools which were more segregated. One white student recalled how this experience has come to benefit him, saying “Being a white guy, I’ve been around a lot of people who aren’t the same race as me. I really didn’t think of it though, I didn’t notice a difference really, I came to think of us as all one kind of person, and I think that in the classroom that was true as well. I didn’t ever notice people picking on kids for any reason that would be related to their race, and it’s sad that that’s not true everywhere else because, well, I just can’t imagine that. - I think a strength is again just the diversity in general, just growing up around a bunch of different people and a bunch of different races was definitely good. When you get to the college level and get out in the real world it’s just something you’re used to, when you grow up with diversity it’s just what you’ve always known”⁹. Others agreed that growing up in a diverse city had better outcomes in the long run, as one student put it, “When you grow up in Brockton you’re surrounded by so many different people that it’s kind of just the norm. I think diversity has been normalized a lot and they don’t feel uncomfortable and it prepares them for the real world because it’s not a culture shock when they walk into a different place with different people, they’re used to it”³. The impact of racial integration goes beyond the classrooms and schools in Brockton, it teaches valuable life lessons to students about respect and appreciation for one another that they carry with them for the rest of their lives.

⁶ S/M/W/6

⁹ S/M/W/5

³ S/M/B/7

Conclusion

School segregation is a major racial issue that continues to rob many American children from the education they deserve. The public needs to understand the discriminatory history behind this problem in order to finally address it. Luckily, areas like Brockton have taken steps of their own, implementing unique desegregation efforts to level the playing field for students. The city of Brockton's strategic single high school forces all member of the community to unite under one roof, eliminating the threats of different income-based funding for different schools. The earlier levels of education have adopted freedom of choice plans that allow parents to have a say in which elementary or middle school their student attends. Most importantly, within the schools there are great efforts, inside and outside of the classroom, to break down racial barriers and allow all students the chance to succeed. As one former student said, "Have you heard of that saying, 'the minority has become the majority'? I feel that Brockton really represents that, there's so many kids, and it's great both within the scale and scope of the students. I feel like it's very diverse, you can think of it as its own small world, there is lots of cultural significance, Black, Whites, Asians, Hispanics, all coming together. I feel like that's what makes Brockton High so special, there's such a vast mix of races, you really all learn from one another"³. His words represent the beacons of hope hiding in the city of Brockton. I think other school districts could learn from the Brockton system's progressive nature in order to better our country's remaining segregated public schools.

³ S/M/B/7

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Interview Questionnaire

1. What is your role in the Brockton Public School system?
2. How would you describe the racial composition of the Brockton Public School system?
3. Is the modern day issue of school segregation something you are personally or professionally aware of?
4. What is your opinion on Brockton’s Past in terms of racial integration/segregation in the school system? Have things remained the same or changed?
5. In a PBS News interview, a UCLA professor gave Brockton positive feedback in regards to combating school segregation. Do you find this observation accurate?
6. Are you aware of any programs or policies that actively work against racial inequality in the school system? If so, how would you rate their effectiveness? If not, do you think there should be more solutions implemented?
7. Do you think the school administration puts effort toward diversifying the student population? Why or why not?
8. Do you think the school administration puts effort toward creating equal opportunity for all of their students? Why or why not?
9. In terms of the role of race in your classroom, how does this generation of students’ experiences compare to your own?

10. Based on your own observations, you think that student's races have an impact on their educational and personal experiences?
11. Do you see any disparities or education gaps between Brockton's schools and the surrounding school districts?
12. Do you see any particular strengths or weaknesses that the Brockton system faces in terms of race in schools?
13. If you had the mandate and power, what would you change about this system?

Demographics:

- A. What is your age?
- B. What gender do you identify with?
- C. What is your race?